THE

MORAVIAN EASTER.

SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA.

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THREE EVENTS.

In April, 1732, an early passer-by would have noted a little company gathered on the Hutberg, in Saxony. On this hill was located the burying ground, or "God's Acre," as it was called by the people in the newly founded town. The date was April 13, the hour between 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning. They were engaged in singing hyms, and, after spending an hour and a half in this manner the company returned to the church in the village and concluded the somewhat unusual service of the early Easter morning.

Twenty-eight years later, April 6, 1760, a similar company could have been seen on a hilltop in North Carolina, the object being the same, but the surroundings were vastly different. This was at Bethabara, 6 miles north of the

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present town of Salem, and 5000 miles away from Herrnhut, where the first service was held. The little six-year old town was beset with Indians. Guards were stationed, day and night, on the hilltop, and even while the service was in progress, these same sentinels, with their guns in hand, scanned the surrounding country to detect the first indication of approaching danger. Then, too, there were many newly-made graves. Seidel had died that year; Kalberlahn had been taken to his last resting-place; not less than twelve of the most useful men and women of the little colony had died as the result of a dreadful disease. Refugees were gathered in a camp near the mill for mutual protection against the Indians. A company of soldiers on Easter Sunday stacked arms outside the church and listened to an earnest sermon from the godly Spangenberg. These are a few of the circumstances. On this same day, before sunrise, a company of 150 men and women, members and strangers, filed up the hillside to the new "Hutberg" as they termed their graveyard, and united in the same hymns and confessions heard in far-away Saxony, 28 years before.

One hundred and forty-one years pass, and early on the morning of April 7, 1901, a com-

pany is seen in the Salem graveyard in the early dawn of a lovely spring morning. This again differs widely in circumstances from the other two occasions. The first company was a small band of refugees from Bohemia and Moravia, struggling in the midst of the difficulties of the reorganization of a church once powerful, but almost crushed by persecution. The second occasion was in the midst of the great Indian war, and again the numbers were small. The third occasion, nearly two centuries after the first, was the gathering together of between four and five thousand people in a strong and well-organized congregation and with peace and prosperity about them. Diverse as were these circumstances, we find the same underlying object, the same hymns, the same confession of faith, the same hope in the great truths contained therein. There must be some special power to hold this custom, practically unchanged, in such love and esteem from generation to generation, and from century to century.

WHAT IS THIS POWER?

The answer to the question calls for a careful study of the circumstances surrounding the reorganized Moravian Church in Saxony, in 1732,

when the present method of celebrating Easter was introduced.

The German Lutheran Church was the State Church in Saxony. Spiritual life was at a low ebb at that time. The learned men were engaged in controversies which led to rationalism, and the common people were as "sheep without a shepherd" Real, true, warm spiritual life was seldom to be found, all was formalism, which did not supply the longings of the heart.

Men of the class to which Zinzendorf, Spangenberg and Christian David belonged were intensely spiritual. Heart religion was dearer to them than anything else in life. They found in Jesus Christ the fulfilment of their longings. They were not satisfied with a formal Saviour only. Jesus Christ was a personal Saviour. His words and his example were to them for the guidance of each person as an individual, hence the Christ religion became the heart and center of their belief. They delighted in the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, and around the Christmas season the brightest and happiest services were grouped.

Around the Passion Week were gathered other services which were not less real and effective, as the sufferings of the Saviour were followed step by step, on the very days and

SALEM MORAVIAN CHURCH

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often the very hours of the anniversary of the events. In like manner when the grand climax in the plan of salvation was reached, when Christ's resurrection from the dead was celebrated these pious Moravian brethren sought to devise a simple but effective manner of so doing which would impress young and old, and which would be like the opening of a door to let into mind and heart the sunlight of the resurrection truth. The form selected was particularly felicitous as time has demonstrated.

The Easter service is a two-fold service in its nature, and both features are essential. The *form* is one feature, the *truth* introduced by the form is the other. Separate these two, and the result is not the same thing. Examine first the *form*. Suppose a month after Easter a sunrise service should be appointed for the Salem graveyard. Possibly a few score of people would attend. The *form* alone would not attract a large company. On the other hand suppose a sermon on the resurrection truth be announced. The sermon might be most carefully written and most earnestly delivered, still it is probable that more than a well-filled church could not be expected, while at the sunrise Easter morning service the congregation assembled would fill the church half a dozen times. Why is this?

Whence the power? The answer can be only one thing. Our pious forefathers devised a form of service emphasizing the greatest event which has ever occurred on our earth, and thus made the great truth so simple and impressive that young and old, learned and ignorant could appreciate it, yet it magnified the truth in a most striking manner. Such a combination of strength and simplicity, of that which every one can grasp, and yet which opens up a vista so deep and far-reaching that the wisest contemplate the prospect with awe and wonder, such a happy combination of *form* and *truth* is seldom found.

This is the two-fold power which has caused the Easter services of the Moravian Church to outlast the centuries. A unique and attractive *form*, united with the most stupendous *truth* the mind can contemplate. This it is which causes the universal love for the Easter services. It is the same everywhere. In old Europe, in new America, they are cherished and loved. This it is which makes the people in all parts of the earth delight in it. The Eskimo in the north, and the negro in Africa; the Asiatic on the distant Himalaya mountains, and the Indian in the forests. Every land and every clime, every race and every color have shown the same rev-

erence observed in the celebration of the Easter morning service by the thousands gathered in the beautiful Moravian graveyard in Salem, April 7th, 1901.

THE CELEBRATION.

The foregoing introduction shows the importance of the occasion, but to describe the service is more difficult, because the very simplicity of the several meetings forms their strength. That which is grand, but, at the same time, simple in form, must needs be seen to be appreciated. Recognizing these difficulties we approach our task, taking the Salem congregation as the type, and the celebration of April, 1901, as the occasion.

THE PREPARATION.

The season of Lent is a preparation time. Lent with the Moravians is not observed as a time of rigid self-denial, differing in a marked manner from the remaining portion of the year. They consider that what is wrong in Lent is wrong through all the year. What is right in September is right in March. Still Lent is a time when special prayer is offered, and efforts put forth which serve to prepare the congregation for an Easter blessing. A special series of

sermons are delivered on the Friday evenings of Lent. The Sunday evenings are chosen for topics bearing upon the sufferings of Christ. Instruction in the great doctrines of Christianity are given at various times and places. These seasons of instruction are not limited to the classes for confirmation, but are attended by those who are very young, often too young for church membership, as well as by those who are advanced in years and have long been church members. Others attend who do not contemplate membership with the Moravian Church, for example, many pupils in our schools. The candidates for membership form the center of the group. At least 300 persons were under instruction in the Salem congregation during the season of Lent, 1901, of whom 49 united with the Church.

PASSION WEEK

begins eight days before Easter, and closes on the evening of Great Sabbath. The services consist chiefly of the reading of the Passion Week Manual, a little book containing a consecutive history of the acts and words of the last days of Jesus Christ before his death and burial. The Manual was prepared from the Harmony of the Gospels, and has been in use for many generations in its present form.

Edward Rondthaler.

SATURDAY BEFORE PALM SUNDAY.

A service for the members of the Sunday School was held Saturday evening. Many other members of the congregation were present. The lessons covering the sufferings and death of the Saviour were reviewed, and the music was very carefully selected. All the exercises had a bearing upon the approaching Passion Week and Easter celebration.

PALM SUNDAY.

The day dawned bright and clear, and made the various exercises of the day particularly bright and happy. This is the special occasion for confirmations and receptions to church membership. In the Home church the pulpit platform was profusely and beautifully decorated with palms of various varieties, and the services were solemn and impressive. After a brief but earnest sermon by Bishop Rondthaler, the candidates for church membership were received by confirmation, by adult baptism and by the right hand of fellowship.

In the evening of Palm Sunday the reading of the Passion Week Manual is begun. In this service the account of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem is communicated, and the welcome of

the hosannas is described both in the reading and in the hymns and anthems.

MONDAY, TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY.

Each evening the reading of the Passion Week Manual is continued. The method pursued in the services is unique, simple but very impressive. The narrative from the harmony of the Gospels is read without comment on the part of the minister, and this reading of the actual words of Scripture forms the main portion of the service. At intervals carefully selected hymns are sung by the congregation, a small printed programme guiding the members, so that not even the announcing of the number of the hymn breaks in upon the reverent reading of this "sermon of Scripture narrative."

The effect of this form of service is marked, upon children as well as upon adults. Many young people attend, and the impressions made are vivid, the results lifelong.

Thus, from evening to evening, the story of the Saviour's last words and works of loving ministry is impressed upon the hearers' hearts. The voices of young and old join in the beautiful chorals, which express the Church's faith and love with regard to the dear Redeemer. In this solemn yet simple way the interest

deepens towards the celebration of what is called the Maundy Thursday of Holy Week.

MAUNDY THURSDAY.

The idea of this day is directly set forth by the meaning of the word itself, the observance of the Passover. All is centered around the celebration of that feast, at which time the Holy Communion was instituted, the most sacred of all the Christian services. There are three meetings on Thursday.

At half-past two o'clock the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper is read, and also the high priestly prayer.

At four o'clock the description of the agony in the garden of Gethsemane and the betrayal by Judas, followed by the arrest of the Saviour.

In the evening the Maundy Thursday Communion is celebrated, this usually being one of the most largely attended communions of the year, and, certainly, one of the most solemn.

GOOD FRIDAY.

In Salem an early morning communion is celebrated for those who were prevented from attending the previous evening.

There are three other services on Good Friday. In the morning, the narrative of the trial

of Jesus before Pontius Pilate is read. The account shows the patient prisoner in the judgment hall; the terrible scourging; the cruel crown of thorns; the mockery; the final condemnation to death by crucifixion.

The afternoon meeting is at the exact time of day when the Redeemer died, and this is the most solemn of the services of Passion Week. The very tragedy seems to be in actual enactment as the account proceeds, and when the words uttered by Jesus, when hanging upon the cross are read, they impress the hearer with peculiar power. Reverently the congregation kneels in silent prayer after the words, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, and having said thus he bowed his head and gave up the ghost."

At night the account of the burial is read, and with the continuation of the same solemn and impressive music which has thus far accompanied the reading, the services of Good Friday are closed. This day is the one which stands in strong contrast to Easter Sunday, the one is pathetic, the other all brightness and joy.

GREAT SABBATH.

The only service which is held on Saturday, or as it is termed on the Church Calendar,

SALEM GRAVEYARD

"Great Sabbath," is the afternoon lovefeast. This service, a revival of the "Agapæ" of the early church, is always attended by a very large congregation and the music is a special feature. The hymns used are of such a nature that the mind is carried back to the sufferings of the preceding days and forward in the anticipation of the resurrection.

EASTER SUNDAY.

With the advent of Easter itself everything changes. Already before the first appearance of dawn musicians have visited the various portions of the towns and discoursed melodies which breathe the Easter spirit.

Later, the church bell is rung, and in the very early morning the large concourse of people begins to gather in front of the church. At half-past five o'clock the doors of the church are thrown open, and the Bishop takes his place on the front steps greeting the multitude with the words:

> "*The Lord is risen,*
> *The Lord is risen indeed.*"

He then reads the first portion of the Easter Litany, in which the congregation joins by responses and by the singing of appropriate hymns.

The procession moves from the church to the graveyard, through the avenue of giant cedars. The numbers are large, there being usually from 3000 to 5000 persons present. The company of musicians is divided into two sections, and as the vast but orderly procession proceeds from the church to the graveyard, these two companies discourse sacred music. One of the interesting features is the antiphonal nature of the music. The first division plays the first line of the choral, the second company promptly responding by playing the second line, and even though these companies are separated by a procession consisting of a thousand people, the rendering of this sweet music is as exact as if the musicians stood side by side.

Thus they proceed, young and old alike interested, and reverently they arrange themselves in open squares as the formation within the sacred grounds. When all have been placed in their positions, absolute quiet ensues as the man of God again raises his voice in the praying of the Litany or confession of faith, and the congregation joins in the hymns selected for this particular service. The words of the confession clearly describe the real idea of the service on the graveyard. The early hour is selected because Jesus rose early on Easter Sunday morn-

ing. The place is selected because as Jesus' body rested in the tomb, so these graves contain the bodies of loved ones. The day is chosen because it is the resurrection day, and the congregation confesses its faith in the resurrection of the bodies of the Christian dead, and belief in the resurrection of our bodies when we have gone to our own rest in the silent tomb. The following words from the Easter Litany will illustrate the spirit of the entire confession :

"I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better; I shall never taste death; yea, I shall attain unto the resurrection of the dead: for the body which I shall put off, this grain of corruptibility, shall put on incorruption; my flesh shall rest in hope.

"And the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, shall also quicken these our mortal bodies, if so be that the Spirit of God hath dwelt in them.

"And keep us in everlasting fellowship with those of our brethren and sisters who, since last Easter-day, have entered into the joy of their Lord, and with the whole church triumphant, and let us rest together in thy presence from our labors."

After the service many remain to enjoy the beautiful flowers which the hands of affection have placed on the graves of loved ones.

By this time the sun has risen above the horizon, and everything is bathed in his glorious light,—the great cedars of a century's growth; the fresh green sward of early spring; the flower decked graves with their spotless tombstones; everything is bright and happy and speaks the joys of Easter day.

The service at 11 o'clock is always particularly instructive and inspiring. The sermon is looked forward to by the Christian hearers as one which brings out the brightest truths of our religion. The attendance is very large, the decorations elaborate, and the music, both vocal and instrumental, inspiring.

During the afternoon of Easter Day, if the weather is bright and clear, thousands of friends visit the graveyard to enjoy the scene, bright with the floral decorations, and to admire the neatly kept grounds. The avenue and graveyard are always beautiful, but never more so than at Easter.

In the evening service the reading of the Manual is concluded, the account of the resurrection being communicated. With a few earnest words from the pastor, and with a number of appropriate hymns the Passion Week and Easter services are ended.

It is worthy of note that the number of visitors seems rather to increase than otherwise. And it is also worthy of mention that the spirit of reverence for the occasion is very deep and earnest. This is true of all the services. With the increase of reverence the interest in the celebration of Easter increases as the years pass. The joys of early spring unite with the joys of the resurrection hope, and it is the desire of every believer that the celebration of Easter may continue to be an influence to open wide the door which reveals the resurrection faith to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.